

VZCZCXRO1301
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSQ #0980/01 2900815
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 170815Z OCT 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5283
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000980

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: OPPOSITION SDSM LEADER AXED IN
NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) & (D)

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) SDSM President and former Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski lost an October 7 intra-party confidence vote, setting the stage for rival Radmila Sekerinska, an SDSM vice president, to run for the party presidency at the SDSM's extraordinary congress on November 5. Buckovski was ousted due to general dissatisfaction among members regarding his handling of this year's parliamentary elections debacle in which the party lost heavily. Sekerinska is backed by President Crvenkovski, who has been engaged in low-intensity political battles with Buckovski since the latter became prime minister in late 2004.

12. (C) Likely to take the SDSM helm in November, Sekerinska probably will play the loyal opposition role in the parliament while she consolidates her leadership position. After that she will take a less cooperative, more ideological approach to dealing with PM Gruevski's government. She is likely to try to distance herself eventually from Crvenkovski to demonstrate her independence. We expect Buckovski to remain inside the SDSM tent while he waits to see which direction Sekerinska will take the party. End Summary.

SDSM PRESIDENT BUCKOVSKI LOSES CONFIDENCE VOTE

13. (U) Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) party president and former prime minister Vlado Buckovski lost a vote of confidence at the party's October 7 convention. After the vote, SDSM Vice President and former Deputy Prime Minister Radmila Sekerinska announced her candidacy for the presidency, which will be decided at an extraordinary party congress on November 5. The party congress also will decide on the composition of key party structures, including the party vice presidents, and will elect a new secretary general.

SDSM MEMBERS PURGE LEADERSHIP AFTER PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS DEBACLE

14. (C) Party insiders had expected Buckovski to fall given widespread discontent in the SDSM over the former prime minister's handling of the 2006 parliamentary elections, which the SDSM-led coalition lost by a wide margin. Some of the anger was directed at Buckovski's pre-election deal with

junior coalition partner LDP that eventually gave them five seats in parliament out of the 32 won by the SDSM-led coalition, despite LDP's nearly zero popularity ratings in polls taken before the elections. Buckovski also was suspected of being complicit in, or at least tolerant of, corruption that reportedly enriched a close circle of his associates. At the same time, there was widespread feeling among the SDSM rank-and-file that the Buckovski government had neglected the pressing needs of their constituencies.

THE PRESIDENT AS POWER BROKER

15. (SBU) Sekerinska, who is expected to be the sole SDSM presidential candidate, is closely backed by President Crvenkovski (a former SDSM party president). During the parliamentary election campaign, and in the weeks leading up to the SDSM convention, it was clear that Crvenkovski was maneuvering to weaken Buckovski to prepare the way for an eventual Sekerinska victory.

16. (SBU) Crvenkovski and Buckovski had been trading verbal blows for the past year, with a brief "truce" only in the immediate lead-up to the parliamentary elections. Just before the October 7 SDSM convention, some local media ran a string of stories, allegedly planted by government officials with Buckovski's support, inaccurately portraying Sekerinska as having misused foreign aid funds during her tenure as Deputy Prime Minister for Euro-Integration. (NOTE: Although Sekerinska was in charge of donor aid coordination in her Deputy PM role, aid money did not flow through her office. Nor have there been complaints from us or other international donors regarding either misappropriation of assistance funds or Sekerinska's handling of donor coordination affairs. END NOTE.)

SKOPJE 00000980 002 OF 002

17. (SBU) The apparent rationale for the VMRO-DPMNE-led government's collaboration with Buckovski in attacking Sekerinska was to keep Buckovski in control of the party in exchange for his support for a draft police law. The SDSM was split on whether to support government compromise proposals on the draft law, and was betting that Buckovski could deliver the SDSM votes if he managed to outmuscle Sekerinska.

WILL SEKERINSKA PLAY THE ROLE OF LOYAL OPPOSITION?

18. (C) With Sekerinska likely to win the SDSM's November leadership contest easily, we expect she initially will play the loyal opposition in the parliament while she consolidates party support. She told us October 12 that she intends to back the GOM's draft law on wiretapping, for example, which requires a 2/3 parliamentary vote.

19. (C) As she secures her leadership position, however, we expect Sekerinska to step up attacks on the government and to show Social Democratic grassroots supporters she can lead an SDSM with a stronger ideological core than was the case for the more pragmatic Buckovski. At the same time, she will try to distance herself from Crvenkovski to avoid accusations that she is merely his pawn.

WOOLING THE NEW SOCIAL DEMOCRATS?

110. (C) Sekerinska also will test the waters with the New Social Democratic Party (NSDP -- 7 MP seats) of former SDSM member Tito Petkovski. Petkovski never hid his dislike for Buckovski, and there is widespread speculation that NSDP -- currently a member of the governing coalition -- could leave the shaky right-of-center VMRO-DPMNE-led government to join forces with Sekerinska if PM Gruevski continues his recent missteps on legislative issues.

WHITHER BUCKO?

¶11. (C) Another question among the local politerati is whether Buckovski will abandon SDSM and start his own party, or whether he will remain in the party and build his own faction, although he has said he will do neither. Since he reportedly can only count on six of 32 SDSM coalition MPs for support at present, Buckovski likely will decide to remain within the SDSM tent until it is apparent in which direction Sekerinska will choose to take the party.
MILOVANOVIC